Activating States: transforming the delivery of 'welfare to work' services in Australia, the UK and the Netherlands

UK Report back to Industry Partners, March 2009

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Executive Summary

The survey of frontline staff in the UK employment services sector was designed to elicit information on the nature of work being done and the impact of policy change upon service delivery.

Following a pilot study in mid-2008 conducted in a London-based agency, a full survey was implemented in November and December of 2008. The sample included staff from the public employment service (Jobcentre Plus) and from ten other providers – five for-profit and five not-for-profit organisations. A total of 1,196 usable returns were collected representing a response rate of 45 percent. No significant differences were detected in regard to the characteristics of respondents and non-respondents.

The data show that the great majority of staff are women (68%), work fulltime (86%) and speak only English (86%). They are a relatively stable workforce with 57% having worked in the industry for more than five years and only 14% have less than a year's experience. They tend to be trained on the job by another member of staff (55%) and only 19% have had an organised form of training by an outside trainer.

The work they undertake directly with jobseekers occupies the majority of their time (60%) and work directly with other service delivery providers is a small part of their role (4%). They estimate that about 40% of their jobseekers are at the more difficult to place end of the spectrum and only about 17% are considered easy to place. They estimate that about a quarter of these clients do not comply with their obligations.

Caseloads in the UK average out at 82 jobseekers per adviser however there is a large standard deviation, indicating that some loads are as high as 200 and some are well below 80. The daily regime for seeing jobseekers also involves a major focus on this form of work. The average number of clients being seen in a day is 9 and again the standard deviation is large, indicating that some are seeing as many as 16 per day.

The main driver in decisions being made at the frontline are adviser judgement (39%), labour market demand (37%) and availability of programs to send clients to (36%). Most interactions other than with job seekers are with one's own organization, with employers and with training agencies. There is little interaction with other employment agencies (9%) or with welfare agencies (7%). Most

advisers regard the requirement for providing paperwork back to the government as excessive (61%) and about 37% said they had never been asked to give feedback to government on how to do things better.

Acknowledgments

Contents

Introduction

The frontline delivery of employment services for the unemployed has changed significantly over the past ten years in response to structural and ideological pressures. Using benchmark data collected ten years ago, the Activating States project aims to analyse whether and how the activation of welfare clients has changed these services. This analysis will provide a means to assess the components of the new target and market-driven systems in Australia, UK and the Netherlands and to compare different tools for managing both clients and frontline staff.

Contained in this report are the results from a UK survey of frontline employment services staff, conducted in December 2008. The report's method section describes how the 2008 questionnaire was adapted from a survey of frontline employment services staff first conducted in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands from 1996 to 1999. The adaptation process involved a mix of site visits to employment services providers, discussions with industry professionals, and extensive consultation with project partners. The survey was carried out online, and the methods section details the scope of the sample, which involved 1,196 frontline employment professionals from 11 UK employment services agencies.

The Findings section of the report is broken into subsections which describe different aspects of the UK's employment sector. Those descriptions are augmented by 23 tables and figures. The first part of the report's Findings offers an overview of the distribution of jobs performed by client-facing staff in the UK employment industry. It also shows how long staff remain in the one job, their age, gender, education levels and work patterns.

The subsection entitled *Employment Sector Agencies* shows the geographical spread of the industry, typical office size, the extent to which the sector operates globally, and the type of training provided to frontline employment services staff. The next section, *Working with Job Seekers*, explores issues such as how difficult it is to place job seekers into work, the types of benefits UK job seekers commonly receive, and frontline staff's perceptions of how willing job seekers are to get off benefits.

That discussion leads into a more detailed section on *Working as an Employment Services Professional*, which examines caseloads, the speed with which job seekers are placed in employment, how frontline staff make decisions about how to work with clients, and which external agencies frontline staff engage with while working to make their clients job-ready. This section also shows how long staff spend on various tasks, how they learn about employment opportunities, and the types of interaction that typically takes place between the government and service providers. Finally, that section shows how frontline staff ranked their priorities, and the extent to which survey respondents feel they are able to influence their work environment.

In the section titled *Sanctioning Powers*, the report illustrates how often frontline staff typically evoke their sanctioning power, and the circumstance surrounding the issuing of sanctions. That section is followed by *Factors Influencing Employment Services Agencies and how Staff do their Job*, which is concerned with the views held by frontline employment services staff on issues as diverse as the effectiveness of the UK employment system, the functionality of the IT system, the priority agencies place on achieving a speedy outcome, the flexibility of the service offered job seekers, and level of commitment frontline staff feel towards the agency they work for. Finally, in the last Findings section, *Perceptions of the Employment System*, Table XVII is presented. That table contains answers to 31 questions concerning how client-facing employment services staff conceptualise their job, the sector, their agency, and job seekers.

Method

Survey Adaptation

The survey instrument that formed the bases of the *Activating States* research project was adapted from a study conducted during 1996-1999.[1] The 2008 version of the survey was constructed as follows. First, an Australian version of the survey was developed. This was done using a combination of fieldwork at various employment services offices, and consultancy with industry bodies.

The 2008 Australian version of the survey formed the basis for the 2008 UK survey. To adapt the Australian survey for the UK Siobhan O'Sullivan conducted fieldwork at UK employment offices. She visited primarily urban offices, and observed staff working with clients. O'Sullivan also discussed the survey questions with a range of industry professionals including employment services managers, peak body representatives, British academics and other researchers. Due to the increasingly global nature of the employment sector many UK employment experts were also familiar with the Australian employment system and where therefore able to assist in the process of re-wording the Australian survey, to make it suitable for British frontline staff.

Once the survey was adapted for the UK it was piloted at a London office of a private employment provider. The pilot was carried out on a paper version of the survey. Six frontline staff completed the pilot. Pilot participants were given a movie gift certificate to thank them for their time and feedback.

The Survey Instrument

The survey was comprised of 98 questions. Not all questions appeared for all respondents, although most respondents were asked most questions. The questions were predominantly closed, while a small number of questions invited respondents to provide expanded answers.

The research team estimated it would take between 20 and 30 minutes for respondents to complete the survey. Participation was encouraged by the use of three incentive prizes: one £250.00 gift certificate, and two £50.00 gift certificates, for a British department store. The prize draw information and the survey responses were kept in two separate data files.

The survey was open to all participating agencies for a period of four weeks, from Monday November 17, 2008. One agency started one week later than other participants, but it also had a four week response period.

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[1] Findings from this study are available in: Considine, M. (2001), *Enterprising States: The Public Management of Welfare-to-work*, Cambridge University Press, Considine, M. and Lewis, J. M., (1999), 'Governance at Ground Level: The frontline Bureaucrat in the Age of Markets and Networks', *Public Administration Review*, 59 (6), 467-480; Considine, M. and Lewis J. M. (2003), 'Enterprise Governance: The Frontline Bureaucrat in Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand and the United Kingdom', *Public Administration Review*, 63 (2), 131-140; and Considine, M and Lewis, J. M. (2003), 'Networks and Interactivity: Making Sense of Frontline Governance in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Australia', *Journal of European Public Policy* 10(1), 46-58.

The Survey Online

Once the survey instrument was finalised it was sent to a contracted survey company and they converted the questionnaire into an online survey.

The online survey was programmed so respondents had to read and acknowledge a plain English statement describing the research, and read and respond to the first two questions (designed to screen out unsuitable respondents) before they could enter the body of the survey. After that, respondents were able to progress through the survey even if they did not answer all the questions. However, respondents were advised at the start of the survey that only those who answered all the questions were eligible to enter the prize draw.

Each participating employment services agency was given its own unique pathway into the survey. Eleven pathways were issued. Survey participants were not prohibited from entering the survey more than once. This was done primarily because the provision of a single pathway per-agency was considered more practical than the alternative which was to issue a unique pathway to each potential respondent, which would have made administration of the survey considerably more taxing. The research team further took the view that due to the length of the survey it was unlikely anyone would complete the survey more than once. The survey was not populated, which means that if someone left the survey and returned at a later time they did not return to where they had left off, but rather they re-entered the survey at the start. Multiple responses from a single participant, where they could be identified with certainty, were removed from the final data file during the file cleaning process.

Participation Parameters

The survey was designed to be completed by frontline employment services staff working under a Jobcentre Plus (JCP) or the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) contract. Frontline staff were defined as employment services providers working directly with job seekers receiving Job Seekers Allowance (JAS) to either assist the jobseeker find work, help the jobseeker become job-ready, or help the client retain employment after finding a job. The first couple of questions at the beginning of the survey were designed to screen out ineligible participants.

Participant Recruitment

The British employment sector is divided between government service providers, and private employment agencies. The private agencies are in turn divided between those that operate on a for-profit basis, not-for-profit agencies (also referred to as charities or third sector organisations), and those with a mixed ownership type, including some private agencies which are also partly owned by the government. The agencies selected to participate in the survey were chosen to ensure the sample represented the overall spread of agency types.

Once a representative sample of agencies had been chosen by the project team each agency was approached individually, normally via the company's CEO or another member of the management team. In most cases contact was made initially by e-mail. Then, during a three week research trip to

the UK O'Sullivan met with a representative from each participating agency, to discuss the project and the survey process.

Participant Profile

One publically owned employment agency participated in the survey. That agency selected two offices from each of its 11 districts, to participate in the survey. Offices were selected to give a spread of office types. That agency had a potential response pool of 1,078 frontline staff.

The remaining agencies were divided between those that operate for-profit, and those that operate on a not-for-profit basis. Grouping the agencies into for-profit and not-for-profit was not straightforward. Two participating agencies have complex ownership structures, making them more difficult to classify. However, following consultation with industry experts in the UK, one such agency was classified as being predominantly for-profit, and the other was classified as being predominantly not-for-profit.

Five for-profit, and five not-for-profit, agencies participated in the project. Of the for-profit participants, all the eligible frontline staff was available to complete the survey in four of them. One agency randomly selected a sub-set of staff from across the UK. The for-profit sector provided 1052 potential survey respondents. All not-for-profit agency staff was available to participate. The potential sample size from the not-for-profit agencies was 498.

Participating agencies were provided with written information about the survey. That information included a one page form which agencies were asked to complete and return. The form asked the agency to nominate a contact person and to provide contact details for that person. The form asked how many eligible (to complete the survey) frontline staff they employ. In the case of the two agencies that gave access to a subset of their staff, the staffing question was modified so it reported how many staff would be invited to complete the survey. Receipt of the completed form was taken as confirmation of an agency's willingness to participate in the project.

Cleaning the Data File

Once the file cleaning was complete, 1,196 usable survey responses remained.[2] That represents a 45% survey response rate. An overview of the sample is shown in Table 1.

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[2] As part of the survey cleaning process 106 duplicate or incomplete cases were removed from the data file.

Table I Sample Overview

	Number	**Percentage**
Public participating agencies	1	9.0
Not-for-profit participating agencies	5	45.5
For-profit participating agencies	5	45.5
Total participating agencies	11	
Potential public respondents	1078	41.0
Potential not-for-profit respondents	498	19.0
Potential for-profit respondents	1052	40.0
Total potential respondents	2628	
Actual public respondent[3]	420	35.4
Actual not-for-profit participants	323	27.3
Actual for-profit participants	443	37.3
Agency type unknown[4]	10	
Total actual participants	1196	45.5

[3] The actual number of participants was calculated once the data file had been cleaned.
[4] In a small number of cases the survey pathway became corrupted. In those cases it is not possible to tell which agency the respondent came from.

Findings

The Employment Sector Workforce

Survey participants were asked to indicate what job they perform as an employment services professional. As shown in Figure I, 71.72% of respondents work as case managers or employment consultants. That represents almost three quarters of all positions held by frontline staff. Of the other staff, the most common positions, in descending order, are: trainers (8.37%), 'other' (6.03%), managers (6.03), employment liaison officers (3.18%) receptionists (2.5%), and outreach officers (2.18%). Seventy two respondents reported that their position description was not one of the choices provided in the questionnaire. Those who selected 'other' were asked what their job is. A range of responses were provided including stylist, partnership coordinator, mentor, business system analyst, and advisor on self employment opportunities.

Figure I Job Description
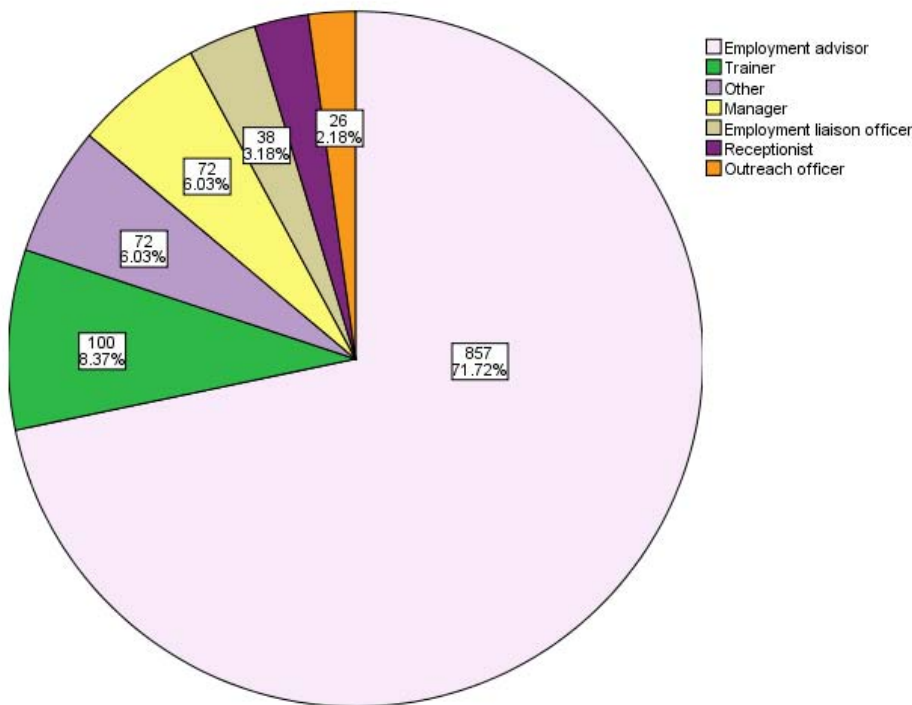
Almost all staff working in the employment sector work on a full-time basis, with only 13.9% indicating that they work part-time (see Table II). The trend towards full-time work occurs despite well over half of all employment services professionals being female (68.2%). A relatively small proportion (13.7%) of people who completed the survey speak a language other than English at home.

The survey results suggest good job stability in the sector, with 57.1% of respondents having worked in the employment sector for more than five years, and 79.0% of those surveyed indicating that they have been with their current employer for over a year (see Table II). Only survey participants

working for private companies were asked if they had worked for a publically owned employment agency. Most had not (79.0%). A higher than anticipated number of employment services frontline staff are members of a trade union (39.5%). This may be attributable to the large proportion of survey participants who are public servants (35%).

The employment sector makes strong use of information technology, yet computers were not always used by frontline staff while working with jobseekers, and at 8.5%, the number of respondents who reported never being logged on and accessing their computer while interviewing job seekers was surprising given the widespread use of electronic data systems and the internet's ability to bring up information instantaneously (see Table II).

Table II Employee Profile

Full-time/part-time work	Number	Percentage
Work full-time	1030	86.1
Work part-time	166	13.9
Gender		
Female	608	68.2
Male	283	31.8
A language other than English spoken at home		
Yes	122	13.7
No	768	86.3
Years worked in the employment sector		
Less then 1 year	125	14.0
1 – 5 years	258	28.9
More than 5 years	510	57.1
Years worked for current employer		
Less then 1 year	186	21.0
1 – 5 years	304	34.3
More than 5 years	397	44.8
Private employees who previously worked for a government owned employment agency		
Yes	115	21.0
No	433	79.0
Employees who are members of a union		
Yes	350	39.5
No	536	60.5
Computer use		
Always logged on and accessing a computer while interviewing job seekers	597	63.0
Most of the time logged on and accessing a computer while interviewing job seekers	171	18.0
Sometimes logged on and accessing a computer while interviewing job seekers	99	10.4
Never logged on and accessing a computer while interviewing job seekers	81	8.5

The largest proportion of UK employment professionals who completed the questionnaire were aged between 35 and 44 years (28.31%). Following closely behind were the 45 to 54 age group at 27.75% and then the 25 to 34 year age group at 27.08%. The two smallest groups were those aged over 55 (11.80%) and those under 24 years of age (5.06%) (see Figure II).

Figure II Age groups
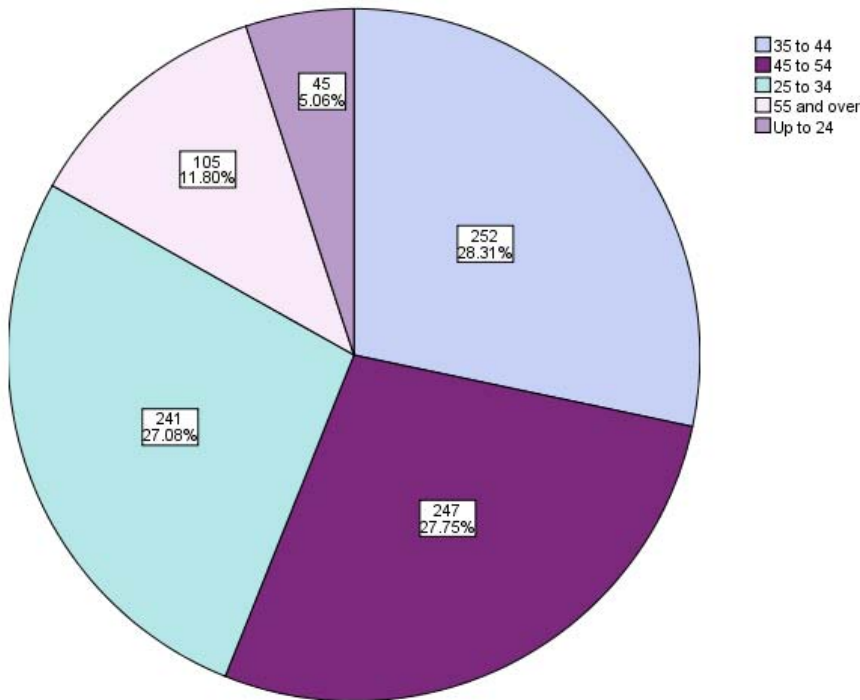
The survey also asked frontline employment services staff to indicate their highest level of education. As shown in Figure III, the largest group at 31.91% were those who had completed their A Levels, followed by those with an undergraduate degree at 23.82% and staff with their GCSE at 15.96%. Twenty two survey participants reported having a trade certificate (see Figure III).

Figure III Highest education level
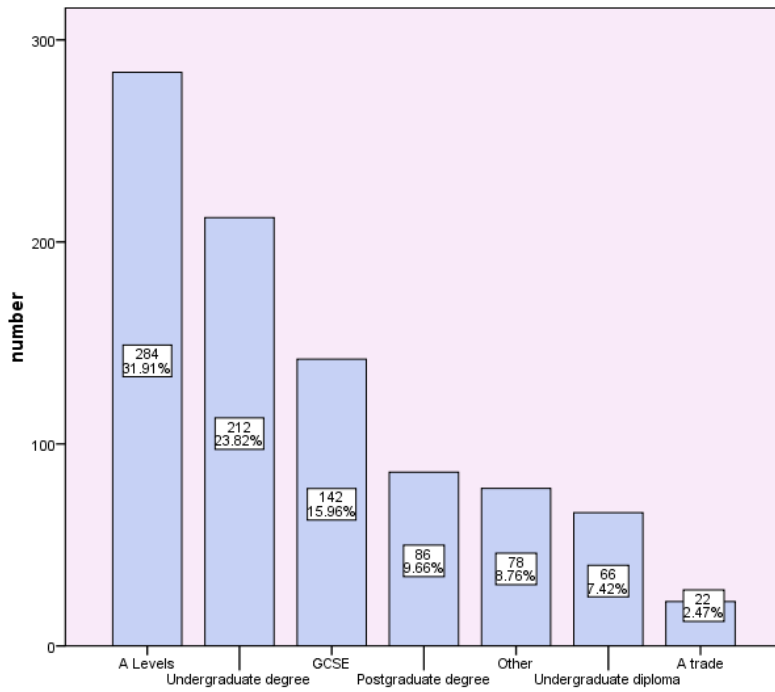
Figure IV Agency location
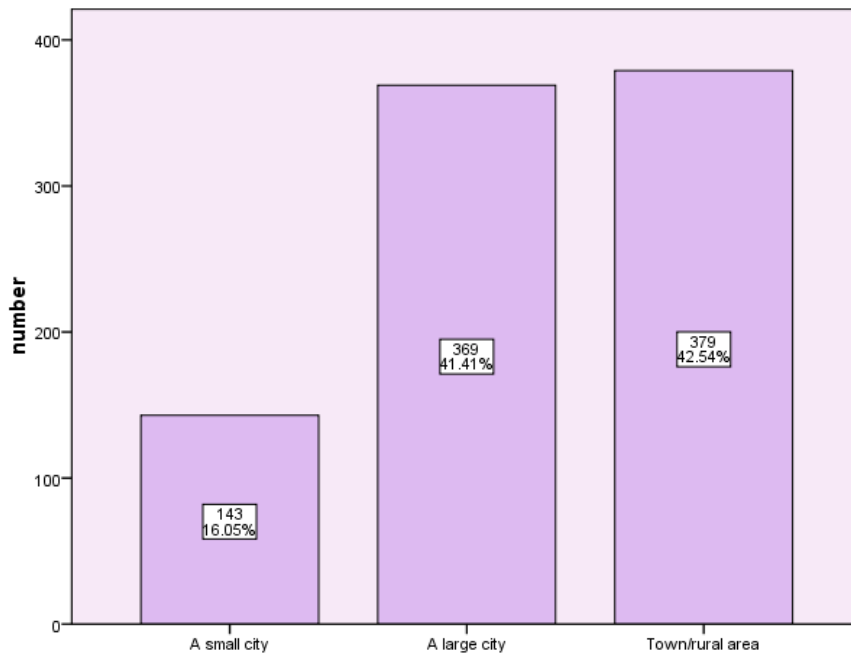
Employment Sector Agencies

There was almost an even split between respondents who work in a town or rural area (42.54%) and those who work in a large city (41.41%). The smallest number of frontline staff reported working in a small city (16.05%).

The largest proportion of respondents work for agencies that have offices throughout the UK (82%). The next biggest group were those who work for agencies with an international presence (15.6%), while only small numbers reported working for an agency with a single office or with offices only in the one borough (see Table III for details). The average (mean) number of staff working in an office was 44.68, with a very large standard deviation of 64.958 (see Table III).

Survey participants were asked if their office provides special services to particular target groups. The response to that question was overwhelmingly positive, with 83.2% indicating that their office does offer special services. When asked which stakeholder groups they provider special services too (that is, services other than employment services), 76.2% answered that they provide special services to job seekers, 28.7% said they provide them to employers, and 32.4% indicated that they provide them to other clients (see Table III).

The majority of frontline staff who participated in the survey reported that they received their job training informally from another member of staff (54.8%). Around three quarters said they were trained via a formal training program run in-house (74.9%), while 18.7% stated that they received formal training by an outside trainer, and 5.3% reported receiving no training at all (see Table III).

Table III Agency Profile

The agency has offices at	Number	Percentage
This site only	12	1.0
This borough/region only	14	1.2
Nation-wide	981	82.0
International	187	15.6
Other	2	0.2
Offices with special services for particular target groups		
Yes	993	83.2
No	200	16.8
Offices that offer any other services (apart from employment services) to the following stakeholders		
Job seekers	911	76.2
Employers	343	28.7
Other clients	387	32.4
Training prior to commencing work		
Formal training run in-house	895	74.9
Formal training run by an outside trainer	224	18.7
Informal training by colleagues	655	54.8
No training	63	5.3
Other	133	11.1
Number of staff in the office (n=1190)	**Mean**	**Standard deviation**
Including all types of staff	44.68	64.958

Working with Job seekers

JSA was the most common type of benefit being received by job seekers, with survey respondents reporting that over two thirds of their clients (74.42%) receive that particular payment. That compares to 24.41% of job seekers who are on another type of payment (see Table IV).

The survey asked employment services professionals to estimate what proportion of their clients they perceive to have a mental health problem. The response was that on average around on quarter, or 26.57% of clients face a mental health challenge. Respondents were also asked their opinion concerning what proportion of their clients they believe would rather receive benefits than work to support themselves and their family. As shown in Table IV, the average response was that 38.33% of clients would rather be on benefits.

The issue of how difficult or easy job seekers are to place in work was explored via a question which asked respondents to indicate what proportion of their clients are easier to place, what proportion are more difficult to place, and which sit somewhere in-between. The results are shown in Table IV. The results tend towards the more difficult to place end of the spectrum with 39.03% of job seekers, on average, being described as 'more difficult to place', and 21.26% being described as difficult to place. The combined percentage of the two difficult groups is 60.29%. A little over 17% of job seekers were categorised as relatively easy to place (17.82%), while a little over 18% were described by respondents as being the most easy to place (18.26%).

Respondents were also asked to indicate whether the job seekers they work with are seeking work only, or are also participating in an activity. The results, which are contained in Table IV, show that the largest proportion of clients are looking for work, but not participating in an activity (41.29%). That group is followed by job seekers that are participating in an activity only (28.25%). The two smallest groups were those who are receiving support after being placed in a job or program (14.04%) and those that are neither participating in an activity nor looking for work (10.00%).

Job seekers may be monitored more or less intensively depending on a number of variables, including whether they are a new job seeker, whether they are participating in an activity, or whether they have been placed in a job. To gauge monitoring levels in practice, survey participants were asked what proportion of their clients they followed either: closely, somewhat, a little, or not at all. The largest proportion of clients, at 56.74%, are followed closely. The next largest group of clients (16.52%) are not followed at all. That is followed by clients that are followed somewhat (15.68%), and finally clients that are followed a little (9.19). Respondents were further asked to estimate what proportion of their clients do not meet their obligations as job seeker. The average response was that 26.76% of job seekers do not comply with their obligations (see Table IV).

Table IV Job Seeker Profile

Proportion of clients that are estimated are (n=1196)	Mean percentage	Standard deviation
JSA clients	74.42	32.174
Receiving IB, IS or another type of pension	24.41	31.250
Proportion of clients perceived to have a mental health problem (n=1114)		
	26.57	24.682
Approximately what percentage of people who apply for benefits or an allowance do you think would rather be on benefits than work to support themselves and their families?		
Percentage (n=926)	38.33	22.568
Proportion of job seekers that are easier to place versus more difficult to place (n=1118)		
1 (easier to place)	18.26	18.529
2	17.82	12.235
3	21.26	14.574
4 (more difficult to place)	39.03	26.603
Estimated number of job seekers that are (n=1082)		
Participating in an activity	28.25	29.848
Looking for employment but not participating in an activity	41.92	32.745
Receiving support after being placed in a job or program	14.04	20.923
Not participating in an activity and not looking for work	10.00	16.314
Estimated percentage of job seekers not complying with their obligations		
Percentage (n=944)	26.76	22.650
Percentage of job seekers that are followed (n=963)		
Closely	56.74	37.643
Somewhat	15.68	19.901
A little	9.19	16.356
Not at all	16.52	31.839

Working as an Employment Services Professional

On average, survey respondents reported having a caseload of 81.96 clients. However, that question also generated a very large standard deviation of 246.109. Only survey participants that identified themselves as employment consultants were asked what their caseload is. This suggests that the wide variation is not a result of some respondents working in capacities other than as employment consultants. Active caseloads were slightly lower at 75.17%, and the much smaller standard deviation for this question (27.93) indicates this is probably a more accurate indicator of actual case loads. Results are contained in Table V. Wide variations also occurred in response to the question which asked how many job seekers frontline staff see in a day. The average response was 9.05, with a standard deviation of 16.743 (see Table V).

The survey asked how many job seekers had been placed in work in the last month and the last year. On average, 5.48 people had been placed into work in the last month. That represented 14.65% of the respondents' caseload. At the same time, respondents reported having placed an average of 55.41 people into work in the last year. That represents 32.34% of the overall caseload. The large standard deviation for the questions which asked about the number of people placed into work in the last year (82.927) again suggests a large degree of variation in that area (see Table V).

Over half of all respondents (56.2%) reported that they use a client classification checklist or tool to assist them in deciding how to work with job seekers, while 14.8% of respondents said this is not applicable to their position (see Table V).

Table V Working with Job seekers

	Mean percentage	Standard deviation
Current caseload (n=668)	81.96	246.109
Current active caseload (n=680)	75.17	27.013
Number of job seekers seen on an average day (n=667)	9.05	16.743
Estimated number of people placed in work in the last month		
People placed in work (n=711)	5.48	6.045
Percentage of caseload (n=627)	14.65	17.077
Estimated number of people placed in work in the last year		
People placed in work (n=471)	55.41	82.927
Percentage of caseload (n=409)	32.34	25.408
Use of a client classification Tool	**Number**	**Value percentage**
Used when deciding how to work with clients	593	56.2
Not used	307	29.1
Not applicable to the position	156	14.8

Employment professionals make numerous decisions concerning the type of assistance an individual job seeker should receive. The questionnaire asked frontline staff to indicate how influential a range of factors are in determining the types of activities recommended for each job seeker. The results are shown in Table VI. Respondents indicated that the need to substantiate a case for sanctioning someone (32.3%), and the need to get a quick outcome (20.5%) were the factors least likely to influence this decision, while the staff member's own judgement (38.7%), labour market demand (36.8%) and the availability of labour market program vacancies (36.4%) were the three most influential factors.

Table VI Influences when determining what activities are recommended for each job seeker

	Percentage			
	Not at all influential	Somewhat influential	Quite influential	Very influential
Answers to a standard set of assessment questions (n=992)	13.4	39.4	30.3	16.8
Other assessment results (n=997)	14.4	38.0	34.9	12.7
My own judgment (n=988)	1.9	16.3	43.1	38.7
Job seeker's preference for activities (n=985)	2.7	24.6	46.3	26.4
Labour market demand (n=989)	5.1	19.4	36.7	36.8
Availability of labour market program vacancies (n=986)	7.0	19.8	36.7	36.4
Access to funds for special assistance (n=988)	16.0	34.4	28.2	21.4
Need to substantiate a case for sanctioning someone (n=984)	32.3	31.3	22.5	13.9
Need to get an outcome quickly (n=988)	28.5	33.9	22.3	15.3

Table VII shows the regulatory of contact between employment services frontline staff and various service providers, excluding contact associated with assisting a job seeker obtain a job interview. The results show that frontline staff are in regular contact with employers, with 29.6% of respondents indicating that they speak to employers on a daily basis. The lines of communication are also strong between different offices in the one organisation. A little over one third of respondents (33.8%) said that they are in contact with another office in their organisation on a daily basis. At the other extreme, the results show that frontline staff do not have strong links with the media, schools and universities or service clubs; 71.0% said they never contact the local media, 43.1% said they never contact schools and universities and 41.6% said they never contact local service clubs (see Table VII). The links between frontline staff and officials in a government department and local government are also reasonably weak, with 18.9% of respondents reporting that they never contact a government official and 29.5% saying that they are never in contact with local government.

Table VII Regularity of contact outside the office (excluding contact associated with assisting a job seeker obtain a job interview)

	Percentage					
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Less than quarterly	Never
Another office in this organisation (n=961)	33.8	35.2	14.5	3.5	9.7	3.3
Officials from a government department (n=956)	15.3	28.9	12.2	6.4	18.3	18.9
Local government (n=948)	5.3	16.7	15.5	10.7	22.4	29.5
Welfare agencies (n=958)	6.8	25.6	24.3	12.6	20.8	9.9
Employers (n=959)	29.6	33.6	16.6	3.9	8.1	8.2
Training providers (n=956)	26.4	33.9	19.5	7.9	7.1	5.2
Another employment agency (n=949)	9.7	31.2	21.5	9.1	14.2	14.3
Local service clubs (n=944)	1.8	11.3	16.8	11.1	17.3	41.6
Schools and universities (n=948)	1.1	6.1	13.6	12.2	23.8	43.1
Local media (n=953)	1.6	2.5	5.0	5.7	14.2	71.0

Table VIII provides information on the employment services workplace. Overwhelmingly, frontline employment services staff spend the largest proportion of their time in direct contact with job seekers (59.76%). The second biggest component of their time is spent on contract compliance to meet government reporting and administrative requirements (10.70%). That is closely followed by time spent on other tasks (10.42%), working with employers (6.73%), attending internal staff meetings (5.57%) and working with other service providers (4.43%). Respondents were also asked how many meetings or interviews they conduct with job seekers outside their office. The average response was 2.69 meetings per week, although that response also had a large standard deviation of 7.790 (see Table VIII).

As shown in Table VIII, the two most popular sources of information about the local labour market is information from within the staff member's own employment agency (90.3%), and the newspaper in hardcopy form (86.3%). The next most popular sources of labour market information, in descending order are: the staff member's own experience (81.6%), direct contact with employers (60.7%), from government departments or agencies (59.6%), from online sources (58.1%), from another organisation (39.1%) and then from other sources (7.6%). Frontline staff were invited to say where else they sourced their local labour market information from. Responses included: word of mouth, the news, past clients, local knowledge and cold calling.

The survey asked questions designed to learn more about the types of interactions that occur between frontline employment services staff and the government. Around one third of staff surveyed (37.1%) reported that they have never been asked to provide feedback to the government. A slightly smaller proportion (31.4%) reported that they have been asked for feedback a few times, while a smaller number said they have provided feedback several times (15.4%) or often (16.1%) Survey participants were also asked for their view on the government's evidence requirements. The largest proportion of respondents (61.3%) described them as excessive, while 35.8% thought they are 'fair enough'. Only a very small proportion of respondents (0.2%) thought they are inadequate (see Table VIII).

In relation to the IT system, the largest proportion of respondents (62.6%) feel it provides them with adequate information to do their job. Furthermore, the number of staff who work with or without an incentive scheme is fairly evenly split, with 41.4% reporting they do have an incentive scheme and 58.6% saying they do not (see Table VIII).

Table VIII The employment services workplace

| Proportion of time per week spent (n=1001)	Mean	Standard Deviation
In direct contact with job seekers	59.76	26.476
Working with other service providers	4.43	7.043
Working with employers	6.73	12.415
On contract compliance to meet government reporting/administration requirements	10.70	14.206
On internal staff meeting	5.75	5.630
On other tasks	10.42	13.869
Number of weekly meetings with job seekers conducted outside the office (n=950)		
Number of weekly meeting	2.69	7.790
Sources of information about the local labour market	**Number**	**Percentage**
From within the organisation	948	90.3
From government departments or organisations	948	59.6
Own experience	948	81.6
Newspapers (hard copy)	948	86.3
Direct contact with employers	948	60.7
From another organisation	948	39.1
From online sources such as monster.com.uk	948	58.1
Other	948	7.6
No information about the local labour market	948	1.1
Regularity of feedback to government in the past six months		
Often	153	16.1
Several times	146	15.4
A few times	299	31.4
Never	353	37.1
The amount of evidence for each client is		
Excessive	548	61.3
Fair enough	320	35.8
Inadequate	2	0.2
Not relevant to my job	18	2.0
Don't know	6	0.7
Is enough accurate information available via the IT system?		
Yes	556	62.6
No	305	34.3
I don't use the IT system	27	3.0
Does your office have a bonus or incentive scheme?		
Yes	386	41.4
No	520	58.6

Figure V Office priorities
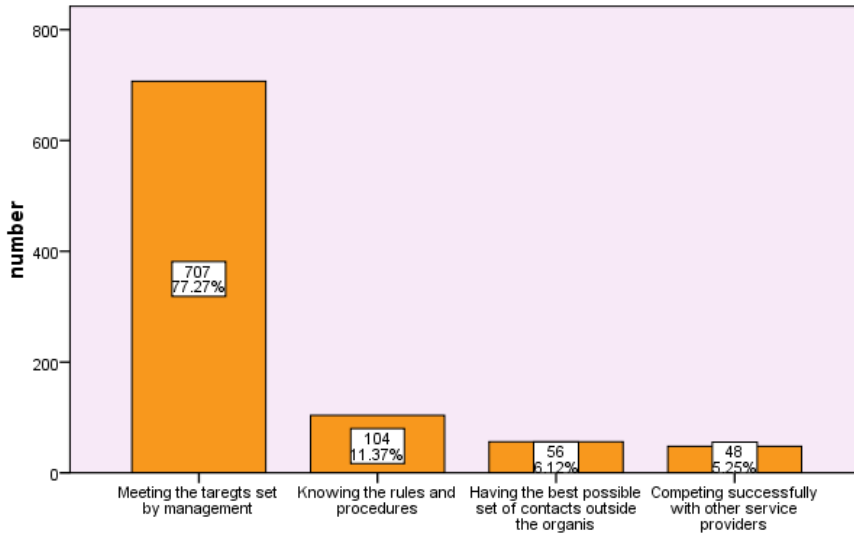
Figure VI Personal priorities
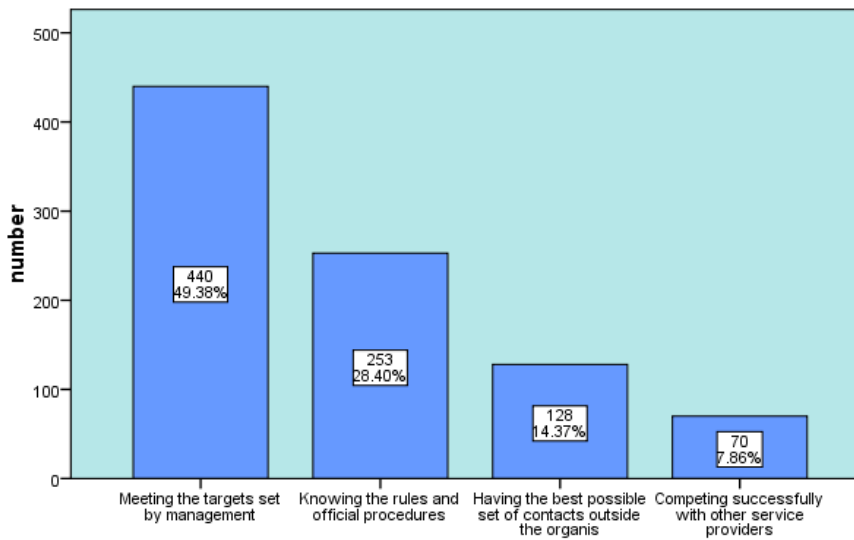
Figures V and VI show the results of two questions which asked respondents to identify which four statements best reflect the priorities in their office, and their own personal priorities. Figures V shows that most people thought that the priority in their office is meeting the targets set by management. That was also the top personal priority as expressed by respondents (see Figure VI), although it was considered more important in the case of an office priority as compared to a personal priorities. Far fewer people felt the priority in their office were any of the other three choices which were: knowing the rules and official procedures; having the best possible set of contacts outside the organization; or competing successfully with other service providers. The sequence of responses was the same in the case of both office and personal priorities. However, respondents were more likely to feel that knowing the rules and official procedures was a personal priority, compared with the office priorities.

Table IX provides information on external meetings. Well over half the people who filled out the survey stated that they do not attend work related meetings outside their own organisation (63%). Of those who do attend such meetings, these take place on a monthly basis most commonly (42.5%).

Table IX External meetings

Do you attend work related meetings, outside your own organisation, with professionals from other employment agencies?	Number	Percentage
Yes	329	37.0
No	560	63.0
How often does this group meet?		
Weekly	18	5.5
Monthly	139	42.5
Bi monthly	55	16.8
Quarterly	90	27.5
Less than quarterly	25	7.6

Frontline staff were also asked to comment on how much say they have in relation to a range of workplace factors. The results are contained in Table X. Respondents said that they have the largest say concerning how they engage with clients (27.2%), followed by the order in which tasks are performed (18.1%), then the speed at which they work (13.8%), how the job is done (10.8%) and finally changes to how the job is done (9.6%).

Table X Employee influence and work related decisions

	No say at all	Some say	Moderate say	A good deal of say	A very great deal of say
How the job is done (n=889)	10.1	28.5	18.7	31.9	10.8
The order in which tasks are performed (n=889)	8.1	20.4	16.8	36.7	18.1
Speed at which work is performed (n=889)	16.4	20.4	20.7	28.7	13.8
Changes to how the job is done (n=889)	18.9	23.1	23.1	25.4	9.6
How clients are engaged with (n=885)	4.0	17.3	12.8	38.8	27.2

Table XI shows how well informed frontline staff believe they are about various aspects of their job. The results show that 43.1% believe they are very well informed about what is to be done, while a slightly smaller proportion of respondents (41.1%) consider themselves to be well informed about their work priorities and 32.7% think they are well informed about their organisation's policies and procedures. The area in which staff feel least well informed is in relation to the money value of their interactions with each client (24.8%). See Table XI.

Table XI How well informed frontline staff are about various aspects of their job

	Very well informed	Quite well informed	Fairly well informed	Somewhat informed	Hardly at all informed
What is to be done (n=880)	43.1	37.3	13.0	6.1	0.6
Policies and procedures (n=880)	32.7	41.9	16.6	7.4	1.4
Priority of work to be done (n=876)	41.1	40.3	13.7	3.8	1.1
How well the job is done (n=878)	31.8	36.8	18.3	9.1	4.0
Technical knowledge (n=877)	19.3	39.1	24.4	13.5	3.8
How you are supposed to do the job (n=880)	29.3	38.8	18.3	11.4	2.3
Money value of your interactions with each job seeker (n=875)	19.8	21.3	17.4	16.8	24.8

Sanctioning Powers

Table XII shows the circumstances under which frontline employment staff typically sanction clients. The most common reason for sanctioning is when a job seeker has behaved inappropriately on two occasions (80.3%). Refusing a suitable job was also seen as a serious offence, with 72.8% of respondents saying they would sanction a client in relation to that matter. The next most common reasons for evoking sanctioning powers, in descending order, were: if a job seeker is dismissed from a training program (66.8%); if a job seeker refuses to apply for a suitable job (66.1%); if a job seeker fails to attend a job interview (66.0%); if a job seeker voluntarily leaves a job (58.7%); if a job seeker fails to contact the office (57.7%); and if a job seeker leaves a training program (55.4%).

Table XII Sanctions are normally filed under the following circumstances

	Percentage
A job seeker is dismissed from a job or a training program (n=493)	66.8
A job seeker refuses to apply for a suitable job (n=494)	66.1
A job seeker refuses a suitable job offer (n=542)	72.8
A job seeker fails to commence an employment program or training course (n=480)	65.6
A job seeker leaves a training course (n=401)	55.4
A job seeker fails to contact our office (n=422)	57.7
A job seeker fails to attend a job interview (n=486)	66.0
A job seeker voluntarily leaves a job (n=430)	58.7
A job seeker doesn't turn up for a meeting at this office (n=458)	61.4
A job seeker does any of these for a second time (n=590)	80.3

A range of reasons were given as to why a frontline employment services professional may decide not to sanction a job seeker. The most popular response was that the case for a sanction could not be substantiated (60.4%). The next most popular response was that the job seeker is normally a good client and a verbal warning is therefore more suitable (49.1%), followed by 37.6% of respondents who reported that they would not sanction a client in cases where the job seeker agreement is not specific enough. Full results are shown in Table XIII. Nearly half (45.8%) of respondents said they had received feedback on sanctioning. Respondents also reported that on average they had issued 2.39 sanctions in the last two weeks, while less than half (46.41%) of all sanctions issued are upheld. See Table XIII.

Table XIII Sanctions continued

Sanctions NOT filed for the following reasons	Number	Percentage
The case can't be substantiated	358	60.4
The job seeker agreement was not specific enough	223	37.6
Fear for personal safety	38	6.4
Sanctions are often overturned	86	14.5
Sanctioning is not an incentive to compliance	72	12.1
Avoiding a reputation for being too tough	15	2.5
The office does not encourage sanctioning	44	7.4
The penalties are too harsh on the job seeker	22	3.7
The job seeker is normally a good client and it is more effective to issue a verbal warning only	291	49.1
Number of clients sanctioned in the last two weeks	**Mean**	**Standard deviation**
Number of clients (n=586)	2.39	3.547
Feedback on sanctions	**Number**	**Percentage**
Proportion of respondents who receive feedback	268	45.8
Proportion of respondents who don't receive feedback	203	34.7
Proportion who don't file sanction reports as part of their job	114	19.5
Proportion of sanctions that are upheld	**Mean**	**Standard deviation**
Proportion upheld (n=497)	46.41	37.636

Factors Influencing Employment Services Agencies and how Staff do their Job

There was a tendency among those who filled out the questionnaire to view UK employment services as effective. Although only 7.7% of respondents stated that the system is 'very effective', 31.3% and 28.1% of respondents rated the system as bring largely effective (see Table XIV). The responses to the question which asked 'how effective is the current employment services system in getting job seekers off benefits?' was only slightly less positive, with 4.2% of frontline staff describing the system as 'not effective' and 5.7% stating that is 'very effective'. Overall, responses to that question were more favourable than responses to the previous question.

Table XIV shows mixed results concerning frontline staffs' level of job satisfaction. While 9.8% of those survey described themselves as 'very satisfied' a similar proportion (10.2%) stated that they are 'not very satisfied'. Some 50.5% of frontline staff were on the satisfied end of the scale, with 16.0% neither satisfied or dissatisfied, and the remainder dissatisfied. There was a strong leaning toward the view that the job frontline staff perform is routine, with 15.6% of those surveyed

reporting that their job is 'very routine' and a further 21.6% of people choosing the next option on the scale. Respondents also tended the be of the view that the IT system dictates the way they do their job with 7.6% saying it only does so to a small extent and 17.0% saying it does so to a large extent. For the full results see Table XIV.

Table XIV Views on the Employment System

	Percentage						
	1 Not effective	2	3	4	5	6	7 Very effective
How effective is the whole employment services system in helping job seekers find a job? (n=943)	3.0	5.5	14.3	28.1	31.3	10.1	7.7
How effective is the current employment services system in getting job seekers off benefits? (n=936)	4.2	10.3	20.2	30.0	21.8	7.9	5.7
	1 Very satisfied	2	3	4	5	6	7 Not very satisfied
To what extent are you satisfied with your present conditions of work (pay, hours, promotion etc.)? (n=889)	9.8	18.4	22.3	16.0	13.6	9.7	10.2
	1 Very routine	2	3	4	5	6	7 Little or no routine
To what extent are the activities that make up your job routine? (n=890)	15.6	21.6	27.6	19.9	10.4	4.2	0.7
	1 To a small extent	2	3	4	5	6	7 To a large extent
To what extent do you feel the IT system you use dictates how you do your job? (n=890)	7.6	10.2	13.1	17.3	17.0	17.8	17.0

Almost one third of all respondents strongly disagreed with the statement 'the practice in my agency is to pick out the most capable job seekers and give them the best service'. Table XV shows that 32.1% strongly disagreed with that statement, while only 5.9% strongly agreed. When asked if their agency tends to focus on raising education and skill levels among job seekers, or helping job seekers get a job as quickly as possible, 26.0% thought that placing the job seeker in work quickly was their agency's goal, while 7.5% thought it was to raise skills. That result was confirmed by the subsequent questions in Table XV, which asked whether management would encourage a job seeker to take a low-paying job, or encourage him/her to remain on benefits until a better opportunity presents. The most popular response was that management would encourage the job seeker to take the low-paying job (70%). Just over half of one percent of respondents felt management would be more likely to encourage the job seeker to stay on benefits (see Table XV).

Frontline staff reported that the agencies that participated in the survey tend to offer job seekers choices about the kinds of service they receive. The results presented in Table XV indicate that 20% of respondents believe job seekers are given a great deal of choice, while a further 18% feel job seekers are given a considerable amount of choice, while only 2.3% thought that job seekers are given no choice at all. With regards to the use of sanctioning powers, 14% of respondents reported that their office does not encourage them to be lenient in relation to sanctions, while 6% said that leniency was encouraged. The largest proportion of respondents (36.1%) sat in the middle.

Table XV Views on how Agencies Carry out their Business

	Percentage						
	1 **Strongly agree**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7** **Strongly disagree**
The practice in my agency is to pick out the most capable job seekers and give them the best service. (n=932)	5.9	5.4	8.2	13.2	15.3	20.0	32.1
	1 **To get a job quickly**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7** **To raise skill levels**
What would you say is the more important goal of your agency: to help job seekers get jobs as quickly as possible OR to raise education or skill levels of clients so that they can get the job they want, in the future. (n=932)	26.0	11.9	14.5	22.2	12.1	5.8	7.5
	1 **Take the job and leave benefits**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7** **Stay on benefits and wait for a better opportunity**
After a short time attending your service, an average job seeker is offered a low-skill, low-paying job that would make him or her better off financially. Assume he or she has two choices: either to take the job and leave welfare OR to stay on benefits and wait for a better opportunity. What advice would management in your agency give to a client/job seeker of that type? (n=930)	70.0	12.8	7.3	6.9	1.6	0.8	0.6
	1 **None**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7** **A great deal**
How much does your agency emphasise giving job seekers more choice about the services they receive? (n=926)	2.3	5.7	10.4	20.5	23.1	18.0	20.0
	1 **Not to be lenient**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7** **To be lenient**
Does your office encourage staff not to be lenient or to be lenient in the use of sanctions? (n=904)	14.0	12.8	15.4	36.1	10.1	5.6	6.0

In the results shown in Table XVI, survey participants were again asked to choose between encouraging job seekers to accept a low-paying job, or remain on benefits until a better opportunity presents. However, in this case, respondents were not asked what they thought management would advise in such a situation, but rather how they themselves would counsel the job seeker. The results were not dissimilar to those presented in the table above, with 56.3% of frontline staff saying they would encourage the job seeker to take the job, while 2% would encourage the job seeker to remain on benefits.

Results were more mixed for the question which asked 'which is more often to blame if a person is on benefits: lack of effort on their part, or circumstances beyond their control?' Responses to that question tended towards the middle with 40.2% of respondents selecting the neutral option. Of those that did take a strong position, 7% thought that the biggest factor was a lack of effort on the part of the job seeker, while 4.3% thought it was factors beyond the individual's control.

Frontline staff tended towards seeing the decisions they make concerning how to work with job seekers as being determined by standard program rules and regulations (26.7%), while there was a bigger spread of views concerning the amount of leeway frontline staff have in relation to deciding what programs or activist job seekers should be assigned to. An almost equal proportion of

respondents felt they had very little leeway (15.1%) compared to 14.1% who thought they have a great deal of leeway (see Table XVI). However, despite mixed feelings about their level of autonomy, most respondents reported that they are very willing to exert considerable energy on behalf of their organisation (32.8%). Only 3.4% of those who completed the surveyed said they are not very willing to exert energy in that way.

Table XVI Personal Views of Employment Services Staff

	Percentage						
	1 **Take the job and leave benefits**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7** **Stay on benefits and wait for a better opportunity**
After a short time attending your service, an average job seeker is offered a low-skill, low-paying job that would make him or her better off financially. Assume he or she has two choices: either to take the job and leave welfare OR to stay on benefits and wait for a better opportunity. If you were asked, what would your personal advice to this client be? (n=931)	56.3	15.8	11.6	9.5	3.7	1.2	2.0
	1 **Effort on their part**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7** **Circumstance beyond their control**
Which is more often to blame if a person is on benefits: lack of effort on their part, or circumstances beyond their control? (n=931)	7.0	8.4	18.3	40.2	14.7	7.2	4.3
	1 **None**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7** **A great deal**
To what extent are the decisions you make about your job seekers determined by standard program rules and regulations? (n=923)	1.4	2.2	5.2	14.1	25.0	25.5	26.7
	1 **Very little leeway**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7** **A great deal of leeway**
How much leeway do you have in deciding which program or activity your job seekers should be assigned to? (n=921)	15.1	10.1	8.8	13.7	21.9	16.3	14.1
	1 **Very willing**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7** **Not very willing**
To what extent would you be willing to exert considerable extra effort on behalf of your organisation? (n=891)	32.8	21.4	19.9	13.1	6.3	3.1	3.4

Perceptions of the Employment System

Table XVII shows that results from questions that asked job seekers about how they do their job, what they think about the UK employment system, and how they work with job seekers. A strong response was generated by question xxv which asked about the emphasis placed on shifting job seekers off benefits, with 32.8% of respondents strongly agreeing and 51.1% agreeing that that is a priority in their workplace. Another strong response was that 32.7% of frontline staff surveyed strongly agreed and 55.2% agreed that they provide a similar level of service to all their clients. Numerical targets were thought important. In question xii 27.9% of those surveyed strongly disagreed and 44.8% disagreed with the statement 'in my job I am NOT influenced by numerical targets'.

The issue of trust also generated strong responses, with 26.9% strongly agreeing, and 47.7% agreeing with the statement 'the main thing I have to do in this job is gain the trust of the job seeker' (see questions xiii). Likewise, there was a strong feeling among respondents that the lines of authority are clearly marked out in the workplace, with 18.1% strongly disagreeing and 52.8% disagreeing with the statement 'the lines of authority are not clear in my work' (see question vi). In turn, respondents indicated that their supervisor does know a lot about the work being done on a day-to-day basis, 22.8% strongly agreed with that statement while 47.7% agreed.

Table XVII Perceptions of the employment system

	Percentage				
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neither**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
i) Many of our job seekers will never find open or regular employment (n=918)	9.4	26.5	14.5	38.8	10.9
ii) I consider myself to be an advocate for the client/job seekers' rights (n=912)	12.3	39.9	36.6	8.9	2.3
iii) Public servants have special responsibilities which are different from other service delivery staff (n=913)	14.1	44.2	25.8	13.6	2.2
iv) Governments should do more to help job seekers (n=916)	28.3	43.8	17.1	9.1	1.7
v) I find that issuing sanctions can really damage your reputation with job seekers and others in the employment field (n=881)	7.9	23.0	33.8	28.9	6.2
vi) The lines of authority are not clear in my work (n=882)	2.3	12.1	14.6	52.8	18.1
vii) I do not like my competition (internal or external) to know how I go about getting my results (n=881)	2.5	8.6	28.4	45.9	14.6
viii) My job can be done by following a few basic rules (n=880)	5.2	34.2	14.0	33.8	12.8
ix) When it comes to day-to-day work I am free to decide for myself what I will do with each job seeker (n=881)	16.7	46.3	12.6	19.1	5.3
x) My supervisor knows a lot about the work I do day-to-day (n=879)	22.8	47.7	11.7	13.5	4.3
xi) The really important rules in this job are the ones to do with obtaining assistance from other organisations (n=880)	1.6	22.6	42.2	28.2	5.5
xii) In my job, I am NOT influenced by numerical targets (n=879)	3.4	11.9	11.9	44.8	27.9
xiii) The main thing I have to do in this job is gain the trust of the job seeker (n=876)	26.9	47.7	16.0	8.3	1.0
xiv) Our organisation has targets for certain types of job seekers (n=878)	41.5	40.8	7.4	6.0	4.3
xv) When I come across something not covered by the procedural guide, I refer it to my supervisor (n=883)	15.6	55.7	13.7	13.0	1.9
xvi) The goal in this work is to find a middle ground between the needs of job seekers, employers, and the social security system (n=881)	10.6	49.6	19.1	17.5	3.3
xvii) I use a lot of personal judgement to decide what is best for each job seeker (n=879)	22.5	59.4	10.6	6.3	1.3
xviii) Before reporting a job seeker for non-compliance, I would always consider which classification group they belonged to (n=878)	6.3	32.1	32.8	21.8	7.1
xix) I like to keep my own records and files on job seekers and programs (n=877)	16.6	43.9	17.6	16.5	5.4
xx) Our computer system tells me what steps to take with job seekers and when to take them (n=876)	8.3	31.6	20.3	26.4	13.4
xxi) When you get a good result with job seekers it's usually a team effort by yourself, trainer, other staff in your office, and the employer (n=882)	20.9	47.5	14.6	14.1	2.9
xxii) To get job seekers to pay attention I often remind them that enforcing compliance is part of my job (n=871)	5.5	34.0	20.2	25.7	14.6
xxiii) My job is determined by goals set elsewhere (n=876)	24.8	47.5	17.1	8.9	1.7

xxiv) More and more the objective in this job is to maximise the organisation's financial outcomes (n=877)	23.7	35.1	24.6	13.5	3.1
xxv) I think the objective in this job is to shift the maximum number of job seekers off benefits (n=882)	32.8	51.1	8.6	6.5	1.0
xxvi) I use our information technology system to track priority job seekers (n=883)	12.1	45.4	25.1	14.2	3.2
xxvii) I do tend to take note of those actions with job seekers that will generate a payable outcome for the office (n=879)	6.1	33.4	33.0	22.6	4.8
xxvii) All my job seekers receive a similar service (n=879)	32.7	55.2	4.3	6.7	1.1
xxviii) I am often asked to suggest ways to improve things (n=881)	14.6	48.6	19.8	11.8	5.2
xxix) I am aware that my organisation pays attention to the income I generate by placing job seekers (n=878)	18.0	38.7	23.1	12.8	7.4
xxx) If an official from another employment organisation asked for help in using the computer, I would help them (n=876)	17.5	38.4	21.5	11.5	11.2
xxxi) In my job, job seekers are organised into formal and informal priority groups (n=879)	8.6	26.2	27.2	26.2	11.8